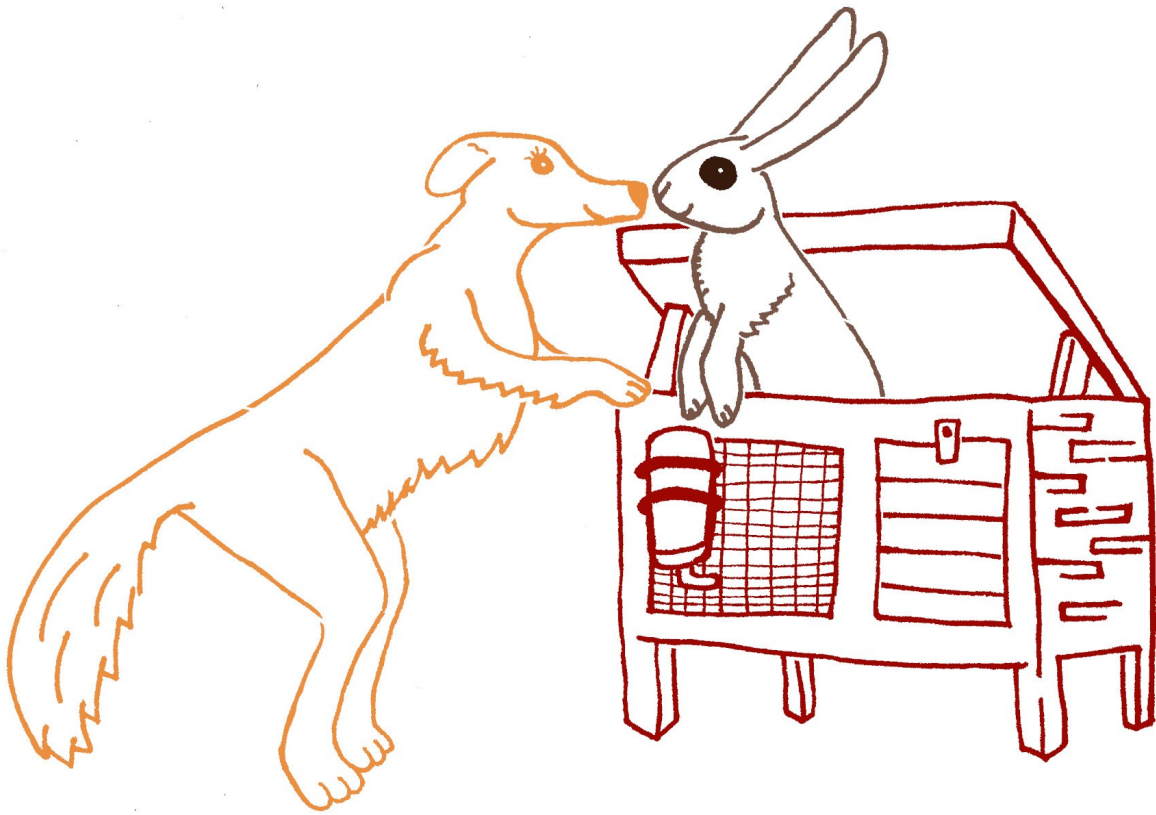


# **The Animals of the House I Loved**

## **- All the Pets I Ever Had -**



**By Sarah Ali**  
**Wednesday 13 July 2022 - 1 September 2022**

# The Animals of the House I Loved

- All the Pets I Ever Had -

By Sarah Ali

Wednesday 13 July 2022 - 1 September 2022

About 13,848 Words or 71,814 Characters

Warning: Swearing, Illness, Death, Animal Abuse, Fighting Animals, Castration

- The names and any other identifiable information has been changed or removed because I posted this text online -

- De namen en andere identificeerbare informatie is gewijzigd of verwijderd omdat ik deze tekst online heb geplaatst -

## 0./25 Intro

There is a great need in me to write this text. Even though I'm only 28, I can feel the memories slowly fading. So I want to lock them in just to be safe. My name is Sarah Ali, I am a trans woman. I was born in 1995, and live since 2021 as a woman. Simply put, I love animals. You can tell how far advanced a society is by how well they treat animals and treat people. Animals have a certain innocence, they do not possess, or to a lesser extent the self-consciousness and responsibility of a person. If you have a pet you can feel this, they are part of the family, they are a family member. I once heard the following: a dog is like a heater of love, as soon as there is a dog in the house or near it, you get love from it, you just have to look at it. I'm talking about platonic love, of course. I would also like to say that all our dogs and cats, neutered and sterilized. In this way we prevent the overpopulation of animals.

## 1./25 Zola, the Cat and the Chick

Warning: Animal Death, Dead Animal Parts, Euthanasia, Animal Abuse

Let's start before the beginning, my parents! I have two mothers, a mum and a mooka.

My mum used to have a cat, she had named him Zola after a writer I think. The cat liked to eat ice cream.

Animals are sensitive to maggots, especially at their buttocks, it is something you often have to check on animals, especially rabbits I've read. Anyway, Mum found out that Zola had worms, so she took him to the vet as soon as possible, but it was too late. Zola couldn't make it anymore, and was given an injection, to sleep forever.

My mooka, I think she was about 9 at the time. It might have been the 70's or the 80's I don't know, but her mother, my grandmother, had bought chicks for my mother and her sister. She even let them roam around free in the house. My mooka didn't pay attention, and went to get a glass of water, suddenly she heard "crack!". It was as if a bucket of ice was suddenly thrown over her heart, she hardly dared look. She had stepped on a chick with her shoe! The poor creature. To this day my mother still feels guilty about it.

My mum's grandma and grandpa (my great-grandparents) had chickens. They slaughter these birds and then eat them. My mother was still a child, but she had seen the film 'Birds' by Alfred Hitchcock. Her brother (my uncle) often took one of the chicken claws to tease mum. Apparently there was a tendon in those legs, and if you pulled on it, the leg closed. That's how he scared the ship out of mum!

Also at my mooka's house chickens were sometimes slaughtered for dinner, she remembered how her mother had beheaded a chicken, the chicken's legs kept floundering and her mother had accidentally let it go, leaving the chicken running around! Apparently this is something that can happen, hence the Dutch proverb: "To walk around like a headless chicken.", it means that you walk around nervous or in a panic, not knowing what to do.

This all sounds rather sinister, I suspect it's different times now. Animals are still being slaughtered, but it happens more secluded, in slaughterhouses. You can then ask yourself whether humanity will not become alienated from the animals that we eat. And whether it is more ethical in larger factories and slaughterhouses. People, now, often use a cattle gun or bolt pistol where an animal is slaughtered quickly and painlessly (or as painlessly as possible). With this gun, a metal pin is inserted into the skull, and shot through the animal's brain, this goes so fast that the creature is immediately brain dead.

## 2./25 Noel, the Cat

Warning: Euthanasia, Animal Abuse

When I was just born we lived in another house, I don't remember it because I was too young to shape memories.

We also had two cats, according to my mother. A white cat that I don't remember at all,

I don't recall what happened to that cat, but he passed away probably, because I don't remember anything about him.

In addition, we had Noel. Both cats arrived after I was born, but I was so young it seems like Noel has always been there. We also had a dog called Vincent, not sure when he joined us. But I saw a picture of Vincent and Noel together in their basket, and they both looked young. It also seemed to me as if Vincent had always been there. He stayed with us for about 10/11 years. But let's not get ahead of ourselves, this is Noel's story, it started like this:

Once upon a time some men were hunting in the woods. One of them had shot a rabbit, or so he thought. He went to the creature, and the hunter was startled for a moment, it was not a rabbit, but a cat! The men heard a kind of squeaking, and went towards the sound. They heard it more clearly, it was not a squeak, but the meow of kittens. The hunters looked at each other, with a guilty look 'Please, don't tell me its true!?' With their hands full of calluses they pushed the leaves of the bush aside. Both cold from their crime and warmth from their cuteness overflowed their hearts. What they saw was a litter of kittens! Apparently, they had shot the mother of the kittens.... One of those kittens was Noel. They gave the kittens to a woman they knew from the neighbourhood. That woman was a colleague of my mum. Full of altruism she searched for a family for every kitten. That's how Noel came to us. This independent male stayed with us for 13 years. I liked him, I stroked him a lot with my hands. He gave me many snuggles. Sometimes I kept petting him for so long while he purred that he eventually dozed off and stopped purring. Often when I rubbed him he was happy and then suddenly, without a warning, he scratched. Then I went to mommy crying 'Noel scratched me!'.

I don't remember this anymore, I was still too young, but apparently my cat had been run over once. Mama and Mooka lost Noel. Whenever they walked our dog Vincent, he would go to the neighbour's yard. Noel just stayed away, and my parents had a suspicion. They rang our neighbours door and asked if they could go in the garden with our dog, they thought Noel could be there. Apparently when animals think they are going to die, they find a quiet place so can leave this world without being disturbed... Vincent sniffed and smelled, pulling on the leash. So mum and mooka came to a bush. In this bush was: yes! Noel! They took him to the vet, luckily, Noel was not in mortal danger. The poor animal did have pain. His pelvis was broken because of a car accident. Mum and mooka had two options. Give Noel a very expensive surgery, or letting Noel heal in a small cage where he couldn't move much. The operation was too expensive so my parents chose the cage. My grandpa, Roland, from mum's side worked on Noel's cage. He adjusted it so Noel couldn't move much. With some pain in their hearts, mum and mooka put him in the cage, where he had to stay for days. Noel meowed a lot, and my parents gave him food and drink by hand. They took good care of him. Slowly but surely Noel was able to heal, and he could walk again.

I grew up with my brother (who is one year younger), Noel and the dog Vincent. One morning I was eating cereal, Noel came over and licked the milk from my bowl. While I continued eating my cornflakes. Mooka came down and said: "Hey Deadname! (My old name) You just let Noel eat from your bowl!" She dismissed Noel and explained that this was unsanitary. The cat of the house often went out alone. Some people think cats should be free, while others keep cats inside, so the owners know for sure that their cat will not run away or die. Actually, our street is quite dangerous for cats, with a lot of traffic passing. We have a window at the front of our house, to our living room. Noel always scratched that when he wanted to go inside or outside. We always had to let him in or out ourselves. As a child I had such a nice carpet with a map of a drawn city on it. I liked this to play with. Unfortunately Noel had vomited on it, and my mother threw it away.

Noel once had to have surgery. He was sedated. We took him home in his cage. He woke up and wanted to move forward, but this poor body was numb. So he looked like a worm. He meowed, helplessly. My brother and I knew it was temporary and he didn't have any pain so we laughed our behinds off! Not much later Noel was able to stand up again, but he kept slipping with his legs, he looked like a failed ice skater. It was hilarious. Fortunately, the anaesthetic eventually wore off and Noel was able to do everything he wanted to do again.

My family and I occasionally travelled. The pets then stayed at home. Our grandfather or a friend of our parents took care of our pets. Anyway, we got back from a trip and went for a swim. We went on foot with our swimming bags on our backs. Noel went with us, he was afraid we were going to leave him. At the corner of a street, not far from our street, he sat down and started meowing. Poor Noel. After the swim we came back and he was happy to see us.

Noel was also a fighter. According to my mum there was something wrong with him, because he had lost his mother at a young age. Sometimes I heard cats fighting at night, it was probably Noel. He came home one day, and his ear was in two, a vertical line dividing his ear in half. A scar from a fight. I went outside once and saw him fight. He and the other cat ran towards each other, jumped and flew into each other in the air, they even turned a little, and then fell to the ground, they would run closer to each other and then fight on.

Around the age of 10 I also had a pog collection. Pogs were all the rage back then, you could find some in bags of crisps, it was mostly pokémon pogs that people wanted. Apparently you could play a game with it, but I didn't know how to play it, or I forgot. What I did do was let pogs slide across the floor. Noel, liked to catch the pogs. This was our game.

Mum had been through something with Noel once. Mum and mooka slept in bed. Noel went into their bed to sleep, or so mum thought. He was running and jumping around, he was acting really weird. Mum looked, and it was a mouse! Noel brought a mouse in bed!

Mooka was asleep, and Mum took the mouse by its tail and went outside. She put the creature across the street, in the bushes. The mouse looked at her with a grateful look and then sprinted into the bush. The front door was blown shut by the wind, so mum had to ring the bell, mooka was angry that she was called out of the bed, but let mum in. We also had other pets such as Honey, the rabbit, or Evert the guinea pig. We let them roam around the house every now and then. And luckily our cat did nothing against them.

Time passed, and Noel had grown into a fat cat. He looked more like a little fat bear than a cat. This was the sign that he had a good life. Once upon a time, a mouse came into our house. Mum and mooka just ignored him with the thought that nature is going to do its job. We thought that Noel was going to eat the mouse. Noel, however, did nothing and meanwhile my brother and I had given the mouse a name: Justin. He was named after Justin Timberlake, it was about 2006/2007 then. Our parents had to do something, because soon we might have a mouse infestation, maybe Justin was a female, a Justine who was pregnant. My brother and I didn't want Justin to die. My mum went to a farmer's store and asked if they had a trap to catch mice. She asked for "Something that doesn't kill mice, because my kids don't want that." The cashier rolled her eyes, and mum bought a trap. She came home, put a piece of cheese in the trap and left it open. And sure enough, the next morning Justin was trapped in the cage. Unfortunately, his little tail was caught in the door. Again, Mum freed the mouse in the bushes and Justin had a nice mouse life.

Suddenly Noel started to lose weight. His fat sumo belly had turned into a long flap of skin that hung between his legs. When he walked, his belly flap flapped back and forth. I thought this was funny, but my parents were concerned. He had problems I can't remember what it was exactly, but I think it was his thyroid. He had to take medication.

In the meantime I was in high school, a school for people with autism. And some of my classmates were a\$\$holes! One boy was angry with his neighbour's cat because that cat always pooped in his garden. Instead of chasing the creature away, he took the poor animal by its tail and spun it around and then threw it away. That cat probably survived, but with psychological trauma and possibly a physical injury. Then there was another fool, who wasn't the brightest. He didn't know how to put music on an MP3/mobile phone and thought he had cured his own autism by reading the news. He then boasted that every time he saw a cat in his neighbourhood, he kicked it. The strangest thing was that he wanted a pet himself, a dog, and tried to convince his parents that he would take good care of it. I know that first kid had drug problems for a while, but got back on track and became a father. I don't know what became of that other bell-end. I can only hope they have left their sadistic pranks behind. This is how many serial killers start, they start with small animals, then big ones and then kill people. I find animal cruelty really disgusting.

Noel was about 13 now, he was an old cat. He didn't want to eat anymore, so the vet said we should put him to sleep. He was lying on my lap and the doctor gave him a shot. He fell asleep, and then the doctor gave him poison with a syringe, so that he would die painlessly. Me and my whole family cried, but I thanked the doctor so he wouldn't feel guilty. Noel has had a life for a long time, full of adventure.

Now around 2020 a friend of mine, Jolonde, had a new cat. It's also a white and black cat, and he was also called: Noel! It's like Noel reincarnated! Jolonde does not believe in reincarnation however, but believes in heaven. According to her, my cat lives in heaven where my deceased grandparents take care of him.

### **3./25 Vincent, the Dog**

Warning: Description Death and Bloodshed

Not long after I was born, my parents had a dog. His name was Vincent, named after the painter. I remember him like this: he was neither big nor small, but I remember him a little bigger. He looks like a mix between bobbie from Tintin and Lassie. He was white with light brown and dark brown spots. He had short, (but not so short) thick hair.

Vincent was a nice dog. We went for a walk in the park with him and played with the branch. But I don't remember so much, except that I liked him. Unlike Noel, he didn't bite. He was afraid of thunder and fireworks. Then he would always cry.

Mum said that Vincent was a weird dog, that sometimes he had a lot of pretensions, that he wanted a lot. My parents had the bad habit of letting the dog sleep in their bed. Apparently Vincent would sometimes bark in the middle of the night to signal that he wanted to lie between mum and mooka. That's a lot of courage for a dog!

Unfortunately, Vincent had suffered a gruesome ending. Our family was leaving for a day trip, I don't remember where to. I was about 6 or 7 years old. We had forgotten something. So mooka stopped with her car on our street, across the street from our house. Mooka crossed the street and opened the front door, apparently the door to the hallway was open. Vincent wanted to go to us. So as soon as the door was open, he ran to us. 'Vincent!' cried mooka, trying to stop him.

It was unfortunately then that a bastard, who had snorted a line of coke, drove too fast in his daddy's expensive car and ran into Vincent! Vincent had survived the collision and ran away. He may have had a concussion and he was completely confused. The spoiled boy was mad at my parents because there is a dent or a blood stain on his fathers car. He immediately called the police "to fine my parents", instead of feeling guilty, asking my parents to look for them or help them search themselves. Mum later told me that this got the boy in trouble because the police gave him a drug test, which was positive.

I remember when my family and I went into the police car. My parents filled out forms from the police, and then the police drove us around, I can't remember why. Did the police help us search? Did they take my parents to the police station? Mum and mooka got phone calls from friends and co-workers. They told them they saw their dog and where. One colleague said she saw our dog in a parking lot she wanted to grab him by the collar, but Vincent ran away from her. We called for Vincent from the police car, hoping that he would hear us, and come to us. My parents dropped us off with their friends. Lien and Hilda. That's where we played with Tim and Matilda. We were worried for Vincent. My parents got a call that they had seen Vincent along the highway. Their hearts sank, this couldn't be good. Mum and mooka went there and got a phone call that someone had seen something laying along the highway.

The following descriptions are rather gory.

My mum and mooka found Vincent in two on the highway. They couldn't leave him there. They dug a hole, they would walk back and forth to carry Vincent's body to the hole. Mooka told Vincent's eyes were white, and when he lay in the hole, it seemed as if he were looking at her. They closed the hole.

A few days later they realized that it might be illegal to bury just an animal on a public ground, but it had already happened, and no one said anything about it. Mum kept the collar of Vincent after she had washed it well.

It was weird living near the street where Vincent was hit by the car. Until now I still live there, but the memory has settled in the past, and for me personally this event is less 'present' in the street now. I remember as a child to see a blood stain on our street.

Was it Vincent's blood? Was it even blood, in the first place? Maybe, I remember it wrong.

Either way, it's scary to be confronted with such things at such a young age. Poor Vincent, you had to leave this world too early and in such a painfully confusing way... Vincent, I will never forget you.

Our dear dog, your life was short but beautiful. Wherever you are, be happy!

#### **4./25 Climb up! (Ivy)**

I know that plants don't really count as pets, but they are living things and I do have some fond memories of them. I never had a garden but we had a small courtyard. There we had two climbing plants, common ivy. One for me and one for my brother. I liked having that. Eventually the courtyard was renovated and the plants disappeared. But now I have many common Ivy's as potted plants, and they keep growing! :)

#### **5./25 Fly Applesauce**

Warning: Dead, Flies, Maggots

You see, my grandfather likes to fish and I was about 5 years old.

Grandpa had maggots that he used as bait for fishing. They were maggots in a small plastic jar. I also had a jar, but a round one with a magnifying glass from above, especially for insects. Grandpa gave me one of his maggots and did it in that jar. I was very happy with my new pet. Mum asked me what to call him and said 'Applesauce!' as a joke, but mum didn't know it was a joke, and so the fly was called Applesauce. We gave him lettuce, and tried to take good care of it. One day he became a cocoon. What would emerge from it? How exiting.

Mum said he was going to be a big noisy blowfly.

In my mind I already saw him flying around, I was so happy. A few days passed, I woke up and looked in the jar.

I was sad, he had come out of his cocoon, but he died instantly. He was a fly that lay on the ground with his paws up. Mum and I gently poured him by the tree, on the street near our house. Rest In Peace Applesauce!

#### **6./25 Honey, the Rabbit**

Warning: Death, Euthanasia

It was about the year 2000 and I was going to be 6 years old. A friend of mine had stick insects, phasmids, and I wanted that as well. Mum didn't like this idea and suggested a dwarf rabbit, she promised to give me one for my birthday.

I was happy. We speak Dutch and the word 'dwarf' in Dutch (dwerg) sounds similar to the Dutch word for mountain (berg).

So, at first I thought she said 'mountain rabbit' all the time. As a rabbit that normally lives in the mountain, I mean, mountain goats exist. Mum thought I forgot all about it because I hadn't talked about it for a long time. It was the day of my 6th birthday and I said to mum 'I know! I know! I'm going to get a bunny today!' Mum was shocked and while I was at school she rushed to the pet store looking for a rabbit and a cage. When I got my bunny

I was Super happy. Mum asked what I wanted to call her. I thought the bunny was such a Honey, so I named her: .... see title Honey! She was light brown with white and black spots, her belly was white.

Anyway, I loved Honey. I fed her every day and cleaned her cage every week. I read to her from children's books and told her about my life. Sometimes, I cried and went to Honey for comfort, Mum would see this and would come to comfort me. We sometimes let Honey roam free in our little courtyard.

Then she could hop around for a bit. After that we had to catch her so she could go back in her cage.

This was hard because she was running away from us. I once caught Honey and Mum said, 'You're hurting her!'

Sometimes I made buildings out of duplo (large version of lego blocks) in which she could hop around, the problem was that if she did a number two, those droppings were then difficult to clean from the 'duplo floor'. Such a duplo floor has protrusions so that the blocks stick, and the droppings were then in between making it hard to clean.

Sometimes we let her hop around our house, making sure she didn't bite any cables. I liked Honey, and she me, I believe.

Children once came to play for my brother's birthday, an older girl picked up Honey and said, 'Oh, she's so tame! I can hold her and she's not doing anything!' Honey lived in a wooden cage. I opened the ceiling of her cage and then she stood straight on her hind legs, and ears up. I wonder if her house wasn't too small.

I recently thought of buying a hamster, but hamsters need at least a cubic meter of space and always need to live with a second hamster. (One meter = 39.37 inches)

This may also be the case with rabbits. Some rabbit lovers let their rabbits roam free and then the rabbits do their number one and two in a litter box, uh, ....rabbit box? During the winter, Honey was allowed to stay indoors, of course. Honey often gave me 'snuggles'. She then rubbed her chin at my fingers. Rabbits do this because that's how they give you their scent (just like a cat gives snuggles). This means that they like you, they say 'You are mine.'

Often when I was with Honey I opened the roof of her wooden cage so that I could pet her, once, the roof fell by itself down and I got this roof against my nose, my nose was bleeding and mum helped me and said 'Whoa, I thought your nose was broken!'

Honey probably knew Vincent. She also knew Noel, but they ignored each other. Honey also knew the animals which I will discuss later! She knew Evert the guinea pig, Lizzie the rabbit, Rubert the dog, Manet the cat I think, but not Manet the dog. (Yes, two animals with the same name, confusing.)

She also knew Lana the dog. Once I opened Honey's cage and Honey stood up, Lana went to Honey and put her paws on the cage. Without pushing it and sniffed Honey's nose. I took a picture of it, I lost that picture now, but it was a nice picture. I had taken it with my digital camera that I got for my 12th birthday.

One day, Honey didn't want to eat anymore. I was about 13, and Honey was about 6 years old, which was quite old for a rabbit. Domestic rabbits live between 5 and 10 years. It also happened to be my brother's birthday so there were a few kids at our house. Nevertheless, mum took us to the vet. The vet said that Honey's teeth had grown together, however she could always nibble on a cardboard wall of her cage. The vet could basically trim her teeth, but for that he had to sedate her, and with her age, there was a big chance that she was going to remain in her sedation. She could then die, go into a coma or suffer brain damage. So we decided to give Honey euthanasia. I asked if I could be there, but Honey would spasm with her legs in her anaesthetic or during the poison injection. She wasn't going to get hurt, it was just going to be convulsions. Still, it looked scary. So mum said it wasn't a good idea. I wished Honey goodbye and kissed her. Full of sadness, we went home. It was a bit weird that this happened during was a birthday party, but death doesn't care much for human values and norms. Maybe this is admirable that Death dares to do this, or maybe this is scary. Either way, it was better this way. We have Honey given a lot of love, without the injection she would become very hungry, and now she could go peacefully after a proper goodbye. Maybe she's gone forever, maybe she's lovingly living in the past, or she's happily hopping around in the eternal rabbit fields.

### **7./25 Snails, Part One**

Mooka once brought snails, she had received them from a colleague. It was a plastic box with lettuce in it and lots of snails feasting upon it. We put one of the snails in a jar with a magnifying glass and gave it lettuce. I saw the creature eating through the magnifying glass and even saw his mouth! How it took bites! If I remember correctly of course, I was 8 years old or something, it was about the year 2004. I think we've freed those snails by then.

There will be snails later in this story!

### **8./25 Sunflower**

Both my brother and I had been given a sunflower. I was about 8 or 9 years old. I was happy with it. I remember when it got cold and I put the sunflower inside in front of the fire. Mum told me to be careful not to let the heat wilt the plant.

In the end I don't know what happened to the sunflower, I guess it just died, and mum threw it away.

### **9./25 Evert, The guinea pig**

Warning: Death

I had a rabbit, Honey, so my brother wanted a pet as well. It was going to be a guinea pig, a black guinea pig.

My brother was a fan of the game Freddy Fish so wanted to call him that first; Freddy Fish the guinea pig. Mum and mooka found this quite strange so in the end it was Evert. He often squeaked, we sometimes let him out of his cage together with Honey.

Often on the courtyard, and sometimes in our home. He was also allowed to stay inside during the winter.

I woke up once, and the first thing I heard was my brother crying in the courtyard. I don't know why, but I knew right away that Evert had passed away. I went down and unfortunately it was true. He had lived about five years, a good age for a guinea pig.

He had lived a nice life with my brother who loved him so much. Maybe Evert is now playing with Honey in the eternal playing fields.

### **10./25 Rubert, the Dog**

Warning: Death, Euthanasia, Blood

My parents missed a dog. They took one from the shelter. His name was Ronny at first, but they thought that was an ugly name.

So, they called him Rubert. He looked like a Welsh Terrier, but his head was more like a Golden Retriever. He was light brown.

He was a big dog, but not quite big. He was always very playful and had a lot of energy, too much energy. According to mum and mooka, he didn't go outside enough when he was young, he was not well socialized. He always wanted to play and jumped at people.

We suspect that he had been abused. I was about 8 or 9 years old. I often played with Rubert. I'd throw a toy, and he'd bring it back, and then I'd throw it back. The toy was a plushie from me. It was the pokémon 'Togepi' that you could turn inside out, turning it into a pokéball.

I played with Rubert, but the problem was that Rubert didn't know his own strength, so he accidentally bit my hand until it bled.

Mooka went for a walk with Rubert. A posh woman who always spoke French and wore an expensive fur coat walked with her husband.

Rubert apparently wanted to play, because he just jumped the woman and playfully bit her coat. The woman was shocked, and

mooka pulled Rubert's leash and held it close to herself. The woman immediately called the police, and complained that

a part of her coat was missing. According to mooka, there was only some saliva on it. The man liked mum and mooka, but the woman

wanted to do nothing with us. Whenever she passed our house she said to her husband "Ç'est sale ici." meaning: "It's dirty in here."

Even if mum or mooka could hear this.

Rubert's life was intense and.... short. I don't know what or how it happened but apparently our front door was opened, as well as the door to our hallway and Rubert had escaped. I have no idea if our address was on his collar, but the doorbell rang. A man held Rubert in his arms and asked if it was our dog. It was like we got a dent in our hearts. We thanked the man and immediately took our injured four-legged friend to the vet. Mooka was driving and Mum had Rubert on her lap, he was breathing strangely.

The vet put a tube in Rubert's mouth so he could breathe. He examined him and said there was bleeding inside, bruising. His organs were damaged. All he could do was take his pain away and put him to sleep.

We all said goodbye to Rubert. We stroked his fur, Rubert fell into a warm deep sleep, forever and ever.

### **11./25 Lana, the Golden Retriever**

Warning: Vomit, Drowning, Death, Euthanasia, Animal Abuse

I guess I was in 6th grade. Mum and Mooka missed a dog. Our street can be busy at times, we had already lost two dogs to our cosy but deadly street. Yet.... our home, our heart, was empty without a loyal, happy four-legged friend.

So we went to a dog nursery, the puppies came from Flanders or the Netherlands and were old enough to go without

their mother to live. But maybe it wasn't so ethical after all because later documentaries came out that dog breeders

did not always go according to the rules. I was allowed to choose a dog. I saw one dog that was calmer than the rest. She was one of

the last one to come to us, but when I went to her, she seemed to like me. I chose her, I suspect she would be obedient as she seemed

rather submissive. We bought her and had to give her a name. I thought the blond fur was reminiscent of the letter 'A'

(I know this sounds weird) so I thought of the name Lana. And so it was, her name was Lana.

As soon as we got home she suddenly had a lot of energy, she even looked like a different dog! Mum and mooka took her to the dog school, where they learned to work with commands and gestures. Because dogs understand gestures better.

The advantage is also that dogs can understand you even if they are deaf. Our sweetheart grew up slowly. I also practised

the gestures and commands with her. Eventually she grew big enough to steal food from the table. Unfortunately. When we ate

we always had to be careful that Noel wouldn't take our food, and Lana would always look for food at the edge of the table,

especially when we were away she would sometimes steal something. We tried to stop her, but when there were visitors, the aunts

and grandmothers always gave something sweet from the table and so Lana learned to beg for food. However, she always had water and

we gave her more than enough food, love and walks. I actually didn't mind if she begged, she would lovingly put her head on my lap.

It was a pity that she drooled a lot, sometimes there were just wet spots on my pants.

People also said that Lana walked quite feminine, our dog had thin hips and moved her hind legs in a specific way, she put one paw in front of the other and not 'diagonally in front of it' like most dogs.

I was about 12 or 14 years old (2006-2008) Star Wars Episode III hadn't come out that long ago and our aunt loaned us that movie on DVD. It was the most hated Star Wars movie up to that point, but I didn't know that, it was the first and only Star Wars movie I'd seen back then and I loved it. I even bought a lightsaber from the toy store and did fake fights with it, on my own.

Lana was scared of the lightsaber, I think she was scared of the noise. I was in full puberty and was sometimes a bastard so I went to Lana with the lightsaber until she layed scared on the floor and showed her teeth. In hindsight this was dangerous of me. Animals can sometimes attack, bite when cornered in fear, with fatal consequences.

It was mean of me to do this, and I feel a little guilty about it now, poor Lana didn't deserve this.

Noel and Lana got along well. They didn't fight, but I don't remember them lying together either.

Once something dirty and bizarre happened; Noel vomited and Lana ate it. It was like a car accident, terrible though you can't look away from it.

We often threw the ball to play with her. But we always had to stop in time because Lana didn't know her limits.

When we went on a trip she sometimes went with us, we let her swim in a pond surrounded by nature, Lana loved water. We went for a walk at the Gavers, not far from our city, and we let her swim. The problem was that the lake was 'held in its shape' by a grid of metal wire under the water.

We had already let Lana swim there, so we saw no problem, until Lana suddenly got stuck, mum jumped into the water and searched for her paw. Luckily she was able to pull her paw out, and Lana was saved from drowning, even her paw was fine except for a scratch.

I also know that sometimes we went to the sea with Lana. We also swam in the sea, but Lana would bark and swim towards us, and then scratched our backs! She didn't understand what was happening, or she was afraid we would drown.

Years passed, I graduated high school, and went to college. As an exchange I went to Japan for 3 months in 2015, I emailed and skyped with my parents regularly, but they hadn't said anything about Lana for a while, so I started to suspect that she had died and that my parents were afraid to say that because being alone in Japan is hard enough as it was. So I started to cry.

It wasn't until later that I saw a photo on facebook with Lana on it, proof that she was still alive, that I was so happy!

She was going to live for the of another 5 whole happy years!

I had graduated high school, and Lana had become an elderly old woman. We used to be able to throw branches and the ball as far as we wanted, now we always had to do a soft throw because she couldn't run fast anymore. Then, if I threw a branch, I did it gently but one meter forwards. Lana would sometimes look at me asking 'should I grab it?'

She now always started barking when I was upstairs and no one was downstairs. One of her eyes had also turned a dull colour, maybe she had become blind in one eye or that eye was severely visually impaired. According to my parents she had also become a bit hard of hearing, because sometimes she did not hear our commands. We used to let her sit before dinner or when we put the leash on her. Now she had trouble sitting so we didn't do that anymore. She was so old that making her sit on purpose would be animal cruelty. She had to take daily medication from the veterinarian, but she started to suffer more and more from all kinds of ailments. They ended up going daily to the vet, but Lana was still wagging her tail, so she was still enjoying her life.

One day we went to the vet and she had a weird cough. The vet said this was water in her lungs. 'It's not fun for her, because it seems like she's drowning, she's having trouble breathing,' the vet explained. So it was better to put her to sleep

for her suffering to end. It was July 30, 2021.... All three of us had tears in our eyes. We held Lana and stroked her, and the vet gave her an anaesthetic syringe and then a euthanasia syringe. She fell asleep, and she breathed, she also let out a big sigh.

She slowly went into her death. At one point the vet said 'now she's dead' but it looked like she was still asleep.

Lana, you were with us for a long time, you watched me becoming an adult and I saw you grow up, it was a pleasure to have known you! She was a soft sweet beautiful dog, and who knows we will meet again, in another life, or another world....

## **12./25 Manet, the Cat**

Warning: Death

A colleague of Mum's had found another cat, a grey one with black stripes and a white or light grey belly. He lived for a while with us.

When we fed him, he ate quickly and fast. He was a sweetheart, he was still young and not fully grown. My parents gave him to a friend of theirs. I think they did this because our street is quite busy and therefore dangerous for cats. I remember that I went to visit and stroked Manet, she was fully grown. My parents' friend didn't want to castrate him, what actually isn't good. There are too many cats, so there is not enough food for them. It also doesn't seem nice as a cat, to be born and to survive in the wild or at busy streets.

The friend found spaying female cats to be okay, but thought castrating males was not good according to her "because then you take away what makes an animal male" according to her anyway. Eventually time went by. I don't know exactly how or why, but Manet the cat had died. We buried him together in the garden, the friend held a campfire in her yard with is in memory of Manet.



### **13./25 Lore, the Black Rabbit**

Warning: Reference Death

After Evert the guinea pig had passed away, my brother was allowed to have a new pet. This time it was also a dwarf rabbit, it was a black rabbit. We called her Lore. Later, because he was in high school, my brother got too busy because of his schoolwork, his friends and music lessons. So he didn't have enough time to care for Lore. My parents took care of her, but they were busy too. So they gave Lore to a friend of theirs. It was a friend with many pets, they had dogs and a garden with a fence, behind that fence they had guinea pigs and rabbits. So Lore could roam freely and make new friends, for the rest of her life. We visited her and, we saw her happily hopping around. But all beautiful things come to an end sooner or later. Mooka came home with bad news, her friend had told her that Lore had died.

### **14./25 The Deer**

Warning: Violence, Death

I was about eight or eleven years old and mum, mooka, my brother and I were travelling. I don't remember whether it was in the Netherlands, France or Wallonia, but we went as a day trip to a forest. In that forest were wild animals such as wild boars and deer. The forest actually served as a shelter for animals that had been rescued by humans, an animal sanctuary. We passed men with large cameras and binoculars. They all wanted to see a deer. Me and my brother walked a bit ahead. Suddenly my brother and I saw a little female deer. We were very happy, mum and mooka said we weren't allowed to touch it. Then suddenly a deer with antlers came and stood in front of the female. It moved with its antlers menacingly, I knew that the deer wanted us to leave but I didn't realize it was a potentially life-threatening situation. I wanted to pet him, and thus 'had to' convince him first that we weren't dangerous. Mum called for us to come back. I slowly took a pine cone and rolled it towards the deer. I thought, 'Maybe they eat pine cones and he'll accept my gift.' The deer moved menacingly with his antlers. My brother and I quietly went back to mum and mooka who were tense, ready to jump into action at any moment. Mum said it could be deadly, and I was a bit shocked it was really that dangerous, but we survived and were close to a deer something the photographers and binocular men only could dream of. According to mum, the deer were probably once rescued, or raised by people, they got food from those people so they were less shy of humans, Nevertheless they remain dangerous animals. Beautiful, and without ill will, but dangerous.

### **15./25 Bonsai**

Around my 12th / 14th I got a bonsai tree for my birthday. I was very happy with it and watered it by submerging the pot every now and then. I don't remember what happened to the bonsai, presumably I did something wrong and it died.

### **16./25 Horses Whispering at HorseCamp**

Warning: Teasing

I can't really say that I know much about horses, or have much experience with horses. But my grandmother who lives in Antwerp has horses, many of which have now unfortunately died. Mum and Mooka are worried about my grandma's pets, because if grandma dies, who goes to take care of her dogs and horses? Anyway, I often got to help clean out Grandma's horse stables, and sometimes drove on a horse. One of the horses was a white horse named Snow White.

Anyway, I was 13 or 15 years old by now. Mooka had read something about a camp that taught children, how to whisper horses and I was interested. We went there, mooka drove the car, and we stayed a few nights in a villa. I was fully enjoying pokémon Pearl on my Nintendo DS. The horse whisper camp was fun. I was with a group of young people, everyone was younger than me, they were about 10 or 12 years old. We had to help clean the stables, but we didn't mind. One of the first lessons was to befriend a foal. We each had to take turns standing in front of the horse, from a distance. We then had to move a rope back and forth. So we simulated a ponytail, and gave the sign that we wanted to be friends. Then we followed the foal, the foal saw this as playing, and then the foal gave a nod, the sign that we were friends.

We also walked with the horses, and did horseback riding, it was fun. One of the boys had a Dutch accent from the Netherlands, even though we were all Flemish. When he was angry he said 'Aargh' like a pirate, I laughed at him a bit, but then he just said 'Aargh' even more. I didn't mean it badly, but the man from the horse camp told me to stop, so I stopped. That boy was good at drawing. We each took turns drawing a penguin. His was round and cartoony and mine was more realistic, but the kids liked his drawing better, so, to be honest, I was jealous of him, but hey, I was only 13 to 15 years old then.

A few years later I went with school to visit a horse riding school. We also had horse riding lessons there. Apparently it was my body had changed, because we had to move up and down while the horse was running, and this hurt my balls.....

### **17./25 Manet, The Dog**

I don't remember how we got the idea maybe we thought Lana was lonely but we decided to get a second dog. It was still the period where I was 13 or 15 years old. We went to a dog breeder.

Later documentaries came out that dog farms usually break a lot of rules to make a profit and that there is often incest among pure-bred dogs, but we didn't know that at the time. So, we were at the dog breeder and there we found Manet, a Beagle. This breed is extremely difficult and stubborn. She was a sweetheart, yes, but very cocky and mischievous indeed. Me and mooka went to dog school with her. The first part was always theory with a power-point and after that it were practical lessons, in which we gave the dogs commands and they had to listen. We loved our dogs, and the teacher told people never to hurt dogs as punishment.

Raising Manet was difficult. I remember, at home, I wanted to make her sit, and she would sit and I gave her a reward, but then I saw that she was actually peeing inside! I had rewarded bad behaviour! Oops.

I would sometimes lift her up when we walked, she was still a puppy. She wrestled herself free, and she fell.

There was nothing wrong with her paws, but she whined, and then started crying even more because I gave her attention.

I comforted her, but people looked at me, it was very embarrassing. Every time we came home Manet had nibbled on something, one time it's a chair, the other time it was books in a bookcase. She also always wanted to play with Lana, but Lana didn't have enough energy for her. Lana even got bulges on her skin. According to mum, this was due to the stress. It was clear,

Manet gave us too much stress, especially Lana. Manet worried Lana so much that if they stayed together Lana would probably lose a few years of her life because of the tension. So yes, we decided to look for new owner for Manet. Anyway, my parents knew someone, a teacher, who I used to teach. She was actually young and beautiful with tattoos. She said she would take care of Manet, despite the fact that she had another dog. She and her boyfriend apparently had plenty of time and discipline.

Manet went to live with her, and was happy there. Lana was also happy that peace had returned to our house. We sometimes saw the teacher pass by with Manet. She is then happy to see us again. It is noticeable that she has become calmer.

I remember well how the teacher once came to visit us with Manet. She had become much calmer, maybe she just had a big

had a walk. Lana pushed her head against Manet rather dominantly, just to say, "You're not welcome here anymore."

and strangely Manet allowed this and did nothing in return. Other than that, Manet is happy with her new owner, and after all these years, she's still alive. I saw her a while ago, and she looked good, except she had turned a little greyer.

#### **18./25 Sonic, the Hamster**

Warning: Reference to faeces, Death

I was 14, if I remember correctly. Honey, the rabbit was gone, and for my birthday I was allowed to have a hamster.

My brother wanted a pet too, but he had music lessons and elocution classes so he didn't really have time for a pet. But we decided he could name my hamster. He chose the name Sonic, after the video game character from Sega. In this game Sonic is a hedgehog,

but hey our Sonic was a hamster and that was good too. I looked up how to care for a hamster. We bought a cage and then chose a hamster. I saw a white hamster, a male, who was playing with his brother. They both looked young.

I chose him, Sonic the white hamster. Admittedly, I was a little sad that he was away from his brother now.

The pet store folks had carefully placed Sonic in a cardboard box so we could take him home with us.

We were in the car and Sonic started gnawing at the box to escape. "Mommy, Sonic is breaking out of the box!" So we put the box carefully into his cage, so that once he escaped, he was safe in his cage.

When we got home we put sawdust in his cage and gave him food and water. I liked Sonic, he was sitting with his cage in the hallway and I would play, cross-legged, on my Nintendo DS while I was with him. Sometimes I let him out of his cage so he could have some freedom walking around while I gamed. Often my legs were in a V position against the wall so that my legs formed walls for Sonic so he could not flee far away. Sonic also had a wheel he liked to run in. Now I realize that the wheel was a bit too small and was bad for his back. Hamsters are nocturnal, so at night Sonic was running around in his wheel, which meant that mum and mooka couldn't sleep.

Sonic also had a 'bedroom' at the top of his cage, he had to crawl through a tube to get there and he often brought his food there.

He stuck his food in his cheeks and then pushed it out in his bedroom, very interesting.

He also peed in a corner there, and he also brought his droppings to it which he sometimes ate. Hamsters eat their own droppings but after it is digested a second time they just leave it there. When I was with him I often opened the hatch of his bedroom.

Then he looked, standing on his two legs and smelled my fingers. He was a sweetheart.

Sometimes I fed him like that. That's why he sometimes bit my fingers, thinking it was food.

My grandmother said she didn't like hamsters because they looked like rats, but when I opened his bedroom door, and Sonic stood on his two legs, her heart melted, she thought he was cute.

However, our large dog, Lana, was scared of Sonic. It was funny how she was afraid of such a small creature, but Lana

had a point, maybe Lana thought it was a poisonous rat. Besides, it was better for Lana was afraid of Sonic. It would be dangerous if she played with him or even worse, attacked him. Now we knew Lana was not even going to step on Sonic.

Sometimes I made a 'house' out of Duplo and Sonic could walk around in it for a while. I regularly put Sonic's cage next to me when I gamed on the play station 2. Sonic then looked fascinated at the television screen. He also liked to climb the fence of his cage.

We often let Sonic run around in his hamster ball, the problem was that he ran so fast that he hit a wall causing the ball to open. We then had to catch Sonic and put it back in his cage.

I had also once tried taking Sonic for a walk outside by putting a leash on his hamster ball. I wasn't even a meter away or the ball opened up and Sonic was running around!  
I ran after him and luckily I was able to grab him and gently take him back home.  
Remember, Lore the Black Rabbit? She stayed with a new family. They had a lot of pets there. They had many hamsters there. I had agreed with the son of the family that Sonic could stay there once so that he could mate with one of the hamsters there. That way my hamster would not die a virgin, it was a plan but nothing ever came of it.

After three years, Sonic had become an old hamster. He moved very slowly, he seemed to be living in slow motion. We went with him to the vet, I wondered if he was going to hibernate, but the vet said he was just old.  
She took Sonic and rubbed him gently, inspecting him. Sonic seemed asleep until he woke up, he seemed shocked, but in slow motion, it was bizarre and special to watch. The vet said he apparently wasn't going to live much longer.  
Indeed, a few days later, Sonic did not wake up. His body seemed a bit 'flat' now that there was no life left in it.  
He has had a nice long life, for a tame hamster anyway. He came into our lives in a cardboard box and left it in a cardboard box, buried to become one with nature again. Sonic, you were an awesome pet!

A friend of mine also wanted a hamster, so I gave her the cage. I came to visit a while later, it was alienating to see, the hamster lived in Sonic's cage, slept in the same place and seemed to behave in the same way. I was happy that the cage could be reused, but the fact that this hamster behaved exactly the same, that hamsters are not original, I just felt a little betrayed. Either way, each hamster is unique in its own way.

Before we had our new dog Cesar dog, I looked up how best to take care of a hamster. Apparently hamsters need a lot of space, quite a large glass terrarium, where they can dig deep. They also need a big wheel so they don't bend their backs too much without back pain. Either way, Sonic isn't here anymore, at least not in this world, and it's time for.... The Next Chapter!

### **19./25 Birds, Birds and Birds**

Warning: Death

Once upon a time a pigeon landed on our courtyard, and it didn't want to fly anymore, the pigeon had a ring on its leg, so it belonged to a pigeon fancier. I was about 10 or 12 years old at the time. We gave the dove grain and bread. I think we even put a bowl of water for him, so a few days passed. Mum and mooka laid a trap, a cage for the pigeon, so they could catch the him. Then they went to the vet with him, maybe he could help the pigeon, or call the pigeon fancier, the pigeon fancier might wonder where his beloved pigeon was. Either way, the vet saw nothing wrong with the animal, it was just exhausted from all the flying.  
He said he the pigeon fancier called, but feared that the pigeon would no longer fly, the pigeon would probably end up in his soup. A dark possibility, but it was too late. The vet was going to call the pigeon fancier, if we were going to keep the pigeon for ourselves, the police would come to us for theft. So we went home. Hopefully the pigeon had a nice life back with his owner, maybe found his courage back to explore the big skies again with his feathered grey wings.

Around the age of 16 I found a bird's nest in a street not far from my home. I didn't know what to do. As soon as put my hands closer to the birds, they opened their mouths, they thought my fingers were big worms and they were going to get food, such a shame.  
An old lady came out of her house and looked at me surprised, I explained the situation. I drove home and took a cardboard box. I thought if I put the nest with the birds inside it, they would at least be safe with me. But when I arrived with the box they were gone, maybe the old lady had the birds taken in and decided to take care of it. Mum told me she once found a nest with one black bird in it, she gave him worms to eat, but one day the bird was dead and she didn't even know why.

Around my 20s, it was about 2014, a western jackdaw had landed on our little courtyard. He also didn't want to fly away. Maybe he had broken on of its wings. We gave him some food. We heard his family crowing at him, and he crowed back. I was still in the period when I wanted to film everything with my full HD camera, so I filmed the jackdaw. Mum called the vet and asked what to do.  
It was already quite late. He said it was probably a young jackdaw learning to fly. He had landed, or fallen into our place and his parents, and possibly siblings, encouraged him to fly again. The vet explained that we could put him in a box, then the jackdaw would go to sleep by itself because of the darkness, then the next day, we could go outside in the park where he could fly away.  
But leaving a bird in a box all night sounded rather mean, so we planned to catch him and free him the next day.  
I gave the jackdaw some breadcrumbs to eat, and Mum told me not to. The vet said if we fed the jackdaw, he was going to stay here and then he was never going to fly away. So, we went to sleep.  
That morning was a great disappointment. The jackdaw layed dead on the floor by a window. Probably the jackdaw had gathered the courage to fly, encouraged by his friends, only to crash into the window. Poor creature. We placed him in a box and buried him. The jackdaw could now fly into heaven.

### **20./25 Grandma's Chickens**

Warning: Cancer, Violence, Murder, Poisoning Animals

Remember when I told you about my grandmother who lives in Antwerp? I have yet to tell you about the chickens she once got for my brother and I. But, first I want to tell you about her pets. She has always had several dogs and horses. I remember one of her dogs well. It was a pug and because of her looks Grandma named her E.T. after that famous movie about an alien. Mum and Mooka said she was sometimes aggressive and bit people, but she was always nice to me. She also had a dog named Serena. It was a dog from the shelter, it had a benign cancerous tumour. This tumour looked like a tennis ball, so they named her Kim, after tennis player Serena Williams.

Anyway, now about the chickens.

We sometimes went to the market there, where they sold live chickens to keep in your yard, or maybe to slaughter the chickens themselves, to eat them. Grandma said me and my brother could have one chicken each. She went to keep them in her garden, at the other chickens, but they were going of my brother and I. We each chose one chicken and gave them a name. I don't know how old we were, but I think we were 10 or 14 years old. I chose a black chicken and named her Black Beauty. Next time when we were at grandma's, nobody said anything about the chickens. I guess Grandma forgot they belonged to my brother and I. I looked at the chickens, and sought Black Beauty and thought I saw her. Years later, I think in 2014 - 2017 I went to my grandmother with my parents. There mum told me how cruel chickens can be. The truth revealed itself. Mum said, 'You may not remember this, but grandma once bought you and your brother chickens, but one night grandma heard the chickens made a lot of noise. The next day grandma made a dark discovery. The chickens of my brother and I were both pecked to death. The chickens didn't understand why there were suddenly two new chickens, maybe they thought there would be less food because of them, or the chickens simply didn't accept them so they killed them.

Later, something else happened. While out for a walk, grandma saw her dog eat something, she told him not to, but it was too late. Not much later the dog became ill. She took it to the vet. The vet said the dog was poisoned, luckily they were able to save the dog, and he was completely healed. Apparently many dogs had already been poisoned and died. Apparently there was a dog hater in Antwerp, he put poison in sausages and then put them near walking trails. A journalist wanted to write an article about this and interviewed my grandmothers for this.

## **21./25 H.'s Kittens**

Warning: Incest, Death

My ex that I was in a relationship with from 2012 to 2017, let's call her H. had been through something once. There are many street cats where she lives. The police wanted to get rid of them but then one of the residents complained that they were her cats. The cats mated with their own brothers and sisters, resulting in the birth of many 'incest cats'. Anyway, H. was studying until she suddenly heard a high-pitched squeaking. You should know, her house used to be a hotel, but it was a bit dilapidated. The father tried to solve it by doing odd jobs everywhere. You could see on the walls that holes and scratches had been filled and some cables were hanging loose.

Whatever it was, H. heard a squeaking sound, she thought it was birds outside at first, but it the squeaking sound was still present. It sounded like it was coming from the inside. She went looking for the sound and she discovered a hole in one of the walls, with an empty space of 10cm (3.9 inch) between the two walls. There she saw: about seven kittens! She didn't seem to find the mother around so H. put them in a box. She tried to give them water, because H. had heard that milk gives them diarrhoea. The next day she went to her aunts who knew how to take care of kittens, there she got special kitten milk with a syringe without a needle. She would then try to give the milk to them, using the syringe. Unfortunately the kittens did not want to eat, one of the kittens was sick so she isolated him so that he could not infect the other kittens. But unfortunately, one morning the kittens had all died. H. tried to stay strong and tried not to dwell on the sadness of it all, she had to focus on her schoolwork, she had done what she could. Her 15-year-old sister was having a hard time with it, and H. comforted her.

## **22./25 Animal Rescue**

Warning: Drowning, Amphibians

Mooka once let Lana out in the park, not far from a swimming pool. She saw a pool rescuer crouching on the ground. She wondered what was going on and moved closer to the scene, the rescuer was giving mouth to mouth resuscitation on a hedgehog!!!! Next to the rescuer was a net on a long stick. The hedgehog seemed to move back, it had survived. The saviour started to tell mom: 'I saw something floundering in the water, I saw that it was a hedgehog. I ran back to the pool, to take a net and then fished this hedgehog out of the water with my net. He's completely exhausted now, can you take care of him?' I have to go to work now.' Mooka said she went home for a box to put the hedgehog in. And so it went, the rescuer went to work and Mooka came home with a hedgehog in a big box. My brother and I came home. We saw the hedgehog in the box, it was crawling around and making scratching noises. We looked at the hedgehog, it was awake and active. Mooka said we had to take him back to the park so my brother and I did that. I noticed how big its paws were, they were black and reminded me of human hands. It was a box without a lid. The hedgehog tried to crawl out of the box, so we had to push his paws off the edge so that he stayed in the box. We freed the hedgehog near the pond, so the hedgehog could find its way back.

Then there was the story of the toad. Mum and Mooka had to go to the basement, there is a groove, a slot in the basement that

leads outside, letting out heat, so that the boiler placed there does not overheat. Anyway, mooka discovered a toad there, which was stuck there. Me and my brother decided to help. I took a bucket and put wet leaves from the street in it so that the toad would be comfortable in the bucket. I took plastic gloves, in case it's a poisonous toad, and made the gloves wet. Because some aquatic animals are burned if held by human dry hands. I took the toad and put it in the bucket, and went with my brother I go to the pond of the park. There I freed the toad together with my brother. The toad did not jump away, maybe he was exhausted from the whole thing. My brother and I left. Leaving the toad free to go wherever it pleased.

### **23./25 Snails, Part Two**

Warning: Death, Cutting, Loss of Body Parts, Grief, Loneliness

It was 2017, I was going through a dark and turbulent period in which I learned a lot in half a year.

H. ran off with another man. I didn't know that love is everywhere and that people can be alone, and I was desperate for love.

I thought it would be fun to keep snails as pets, a project to keep me mentally stable during this turbulent period.

Then there was a rainy day and I saw snails crawling on a bush in my street, and I thought: It's now or never!

I took two jars, poked several holes in them and put two snails in them. One jar had snails in it, the other didn't.

In both jars I had put earth and stones, where the snails could crawl over to their heart's content. If I had to clean one jar,

I put them in the other jar, until I had to clean out the other jar, then I put them back in the first jar, and so on, and so on.

Online, I looked up what snails could eat and what they couldn't eat. Snails should not eat bread. They do eat fruits and vegetables.

They especially like ripe crushed bananas. It is best to alternate so that they have a varied diet.

Many people think that snails can hurt themselves on eggshells and use it as a repellent, this is just a myth.

Snails even eat boiled eggshells! People make powder from it and feed it to their snails. This is how the snails get enough calcium for their shells. So, I boiled my eggs before eating them and gave the shells to my snails. One day I heard grinding sound.

I searched where it came from, and what was it? It was the sound of a snail nibbling on an eggshell. What an experience!

You should also spray some water on your snails every day, as they like a moist environment. I thought if I can learn to love snails,

I can love all kinds of other animals and people. It was a kind of Buddhist practice, to see the beauty in the little things, to see the beauty in the ugliness. Not much later I met Myrtille, she was beautiful, but very active for me, we had a fling together.

As soon as she felt lonely she sent a message and I took the train to Ghent as soon as I could to be with her.

Anyway, a friend of mine came by, K. it was funny because I would say to him: 'Hey K. do you want to see my snail?

Then we can spray water on it together!' Whatever the case, Myrtille had found other men to occupy herself with,

and I was put aside. This hurt me a lot, but I knew beforehand that she also had other men, so considering it afterwards was

predictable and my own expectations hurting me.

Whatever it was, I was sad and I wondered if it was all right that I was looking for love everywhere. Didn't this make me clingy?

Didn't this make me weak? Are we really in a dark indifferent loveless world?

After a conversation with my psychologist, introspection and a lot of reading I learned that people can be happy alone, as a single

and that I should not be desperately looking for another. As I said before, I had punched holes in the discs of the jars.

The snails crawled over it and after a while I saw that the snails had lost pieces of their bodies. They hurt themselves

on the sharp edges of the holes in the jars. I had to release the snails back into the wild.

That's how I learned, if you really love someone, you have to be able to let them go.

### **24./25 Cesar, straight from Hungary!**

Warning: Abuse, Castration

When Lana was alive I sometimes dressed up as a woman, I was genderfluid for a while. Lana was old and didn't pay attention, to her

I was and I stayed the same person whether I was male or female, it didn't matter to her. Lana wasn't there anymore....

I went outside in women's clothes, one of the first times, I went to the park with a quiet neighbourhood. A pomeranian, a small dog,

came towards me with a wagging tail. Her owner was working in his garden and was watching her. I petted the dog.

I realized: animals accept people for who they are and don't look at gender. Dogs don't think 'it's a trans person',

no, they are just happy to see a human!

It was a bit lonely without Lana, we didn't have a single pet then. Yes, I can be alone but such an animal is surely an added value. I even started watching a documentary on youtube about a man who rescued a lobster from a store, and kept it as a pet, I missed a pet so much. So I started doing research, which animal should I take?

A rabbit, hamster, rat? Each animal had its pros and cons. Finally I thought I'd take snails again as pets,

but then I needed a terrarium instead of a jar with holes so the snails couldn't hurt themselves.

They didn't have such terrariums in the pet store anymore. So I had to buy one online.

Mum and mooka said they were going to get a new dog, a little one this time, but they still had to mourn Lana.

Months had passed, and as I said I was missing an animal, how long were they going to wait, years?

But then mum and mooka started looking for a dog themselves, so it didn't seem necessary for me to look for an animal myself.

Mum and mooka discovered a dog shelter that also ran a cafe. The dogs that get along well with people walk there

freely around, so they teach dogs to get along better with people, and these people are encouraged to adopt one of these dogs.

Mum and mooka went there for a drink and loved a little dog named Cesar. They signed up because everyone who wanted to adopt a dog was going to be screened, so they can see whether the dogs end up in the right place.

We feared it would be difficult to adopt a dog as we didn't have a garden, we do have a park close by.

Anyway, to our great surprise, we were accepted! We were allowed to adopt Cesar!

The reason was because mum and mooka said that they are going to let Cesar rest regularly, while all the other candidates couldn't stop cuddling Cesar, which was exhausting for him. I don't remember the exact date he came to us, but it was around March, April 2022.

Cesar is a small white dog with brown spots. He looks a bit like a corgi,

but according to the vet there is no corgi in it, but one of his parents or grandparents was a wiener dog, a dachshund.

The vet said his parents, or one of them, was a mixture. There may be some butterfly dog in Cesar's lineage because he has big ears with long hair. I looked up what a butterfly dog looked like and laughed my behind off! I have never seen such funny dogs. Mum once said to me, 'The vet said he's part dachshund, and I think he's gotten a little taller, or is it just me?'

I looked at Cesar, and he layed on his back and looked at me with his loving eyes. "Look, he's grown taller!" said mum. I had to laugh, Cesar looked so sweet, and the idea that he was getting longer every day seemed hilarious to me. Soon we would have to roll him up or hang him around our neck when we get outside!

Cesar is from Hungary. He was a mutt there. According to mum and mooka he lived in a busy city because he cries every time an ambulance with sirens pass by. I think this is the sign that he is not used to that and therefore comes from a small village.

We always keep him on a leash, he is a little too old to teach him new things, but he was potty trained quite quickly.

He is also neutered, normally the vets make a knot in the vas deferens (sperm ducts), but with Cesar you don't see any testicles, was there a vet in Hungary that took both his balls away? Cesar also has a swelling on his side. It's a floating rib.

Perhaps Caesar had once been run over or beaten, poor creature, which broke one of his ribs. This piece of rib hangs loose from the other ribs, but is surrounded by muscles that make it stay in the same place, if I'm correct. Cesar isn't hurt or hurt as far as we can see. The shelter took Cesar to the vet, and when we also had him inspected by our vet. They both said this rib wouldn't hurt Cesar, and that Cesar is a healthy dog.

Cesar is a loving dog, often he lays in his basket, but sometimes he spontaneously comes to us to see or to ask for snuggles and hugs.

He really is a sweetheart. Because for a long time we had Lana, a female dog, am I used to saying "girl" to dogs.

I say 'Hey girl, are you okay?' Even though Cesar is a boy. Admittedly, Cesar also looks feminine with his long head, pretty eyes and butterfly-like ears. He also doesn't mind if I misgender him. As I said, Cesar whines whenever sirens pass. A lot of people would find that annoying and unlearn, but we think its actually nice. He also has a point, sirens sound when something bad happens, and then it's appropriate to cry. At sirens Cesar howls like a wolf, he tries to imitate the sirens.

My niece once left her dog with us, the dog was called Georgette. Cesar and Georgette sometimes got along well. But they played all the time. It was all about fighting. Sometimes Cesar challenged her and usually Georgette went to Cesar. Georgette had much more energy, and we were concerned that Georgette was to exhausting for Cesar. So sometimes we had to put Georgette in her basket to let Cesar rest. Georgette would go home and Cesar would try to play with us, he probably missed Georgette.

When Mum takes out the fly swatter and hits flies, Cesar is scared. We suspect that he, as a street dog in Hungary, probably had been mistreated once or more. Maybe someone hit him with a stick. Poor creature, but in our house no one will hurt him! Cesar is still alive, he gets a lot of love and gives us a lot of love in return. Today I went to hang the laundry, and Cesar came spontaneously out of his basket to watch me hang the laundry. When I was done I gave him a big, but soft, hug.

## **25./25 An Outro in Dreams**

Warning: Reference Death, Neglect, Hunger

Sometimes I dream about my pets, that they somehow return. For example, I dreamed that Sonic had been living in our small cloakroom all those years. He was thin and I had to feed him urgently. Or I dreamed that Honey has been upstairs in her cage all those years in the attic and urgently needed to be fed. I suspect this is because my brain thinks I'm forgetting to take care of my pets while they are long dead. Every day I fed Sonic and Honey, and you should never forget to feed your pets. I did this every day for a few years, so that habit became ingrained in my brain. Now that my pets have died, a part of my brain may be confused, leading to my dreams. Someone else said that when I dream about my pets, they visit me from heaven. This is a nice thought.

Sometimes I cried while writing this text. I did not expect this.

The most important thing is that we love our animals, and they like to see us. We do our best to take good care of them.

I hope you enjoyed this text and maybe learned something about animals, and I wish you all the best!

Pets are part of our family, a part of our life, part of our home, the animals of the house that I loved.